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PRIMITIVE POETRY AND THE BALLAD.

II.

THE book of Spencer and Gillen, to which I have already referred, gives a welcome account of that tremendous ordeal awaiting the savage when he reaches manhood and is to be made a member of his tribe. Among native Australians this ordeal, painful and protracted as it is for the youths in question, is fairly resonant from beginning to end with choral song; the individual is silent through all his suffering, while the community gives due rhythmic expression to such sentiment as the occasion seems to demand. Sentiment, in a word, belongs here with the situation and the tribe itself, not with the individual and his emotion. No doubt the youth, during his complicated experience, gathers a stock of what most writers call sentiment and Matthew Arnold called criticism of life, sufficient to furnish forth a whole library of lyric poems. But it is not the way of these Australians for the individual, during such a process of experience, to sing his own troubles and triumph; he is besung, now in improvised and now in traditional verses, by leading singers and by the community at large, but mainly in chorals. Evidence of this sort can be gathered from many places and times, and from literary as well as ethnological sources. It all points, with little chance of error, to the conclusion that private confidences about private experience, and whatever qualities are implied in the more dignified idea of sentiment, were unknown to primitive verse.

There is nothing in this conclusion that appeals as new to the student of poetical forms, and nothing that appeals as important to the critic, who is inclined to think it a fairly obvious matter. But he will not call it unimportant, and he may not think it obvious, when he understands what it implies. It means, of course, that primitive poetry lacked the qualities which criticism has come to regard as fundamental in poetry. It means, moreover, a partial revision of critical ideas about epic, or in any case about those poems which were made when artistic control was tentative and had not forced poetry away from its mainly communal conditions. It means a more open mind to the difference between oral and written poetry.¹ For publicity, both in the making and in the taking, was an absolute condition of poetry until the invention of writing; and publicity, excluding as it did the private confidences of the poet, must have lasted well into the formative period of the great epics and worked, in their early versions, to the almost total exclusion of poetic sentiment in its present form. Criticism, to be sure, assumes what it calls objectivity for the epic; but its definitions of the term and its explanations of the fact have been deplorably vague. A. W. Schlegel, in his admirable study of ballad style,² simply says that the old makers of verse were objective by instinct where the great masters of later time are objective by art. Guyau, excellent observer of the character and tendencies of modern verse, is much to the same purpose: unconscious art of the primitive time comes to be conscious under civilized conditions; *notre sensibilité s'intellectualise*.³ Scherer,⁴ who revels in a thaumaturgic use of the commonplace, sees but half of the problem, and explains this unsentimental and unindividual note of ballads and of older epic, and presumably of primitive verse, not by the fact of oral making and auricular reception, but by mere oral transmission: passed along by a hundred singers, the poet's individuality and sentiment—which Scherer assumes in full strength from the beginning—had to undergo a constant

¹By his neglect to extend this difference from mere transmission to conditions of making A. E. BERGER robs his researches on the ballad of all final and historical value; see his "Volkslied und Kunstlied," in *Nord und Süd*, 1894, pp. 76 ff.

²On Bürger, in *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, Vol. II, pp. 23 f.

³*Problèmes de l'esthétique contemporaine*, p. 145.

⁴*Poetik*, pp. 135 f.

process of detrition, which substituted, at every slip of memory, a general idea or phrase for a particular idea or phrase. But apart from the improbability of such an argument, which forgets that precisely the unusual would stick in one's memory and make a given song worth while, Scherer runs counter to the evidence; he ignores that ethnological and literary proof of the lack of personality, the lack of sentiment, in primitive verse. He tries to explain the disappearance of something which had not yet appeared. It is clear that one must rise to wider views of the epic, and find a better formula for its relation to other kinds of verse. Before one explains epic objectivity, by no means the simple matter of miraculous popular conception that Jacob Grimm thought it to be, by no means the artistic triumph that traditional criticism assumes, one must have a satisfactory formula of distinction in the evolution of poetry, which shall reckon with all the facts in the case. Such a formula of distinction may be inferred from a study of poetic sentiment on the lines already laid down.

Primitive verse appealed by cumulative impression to what has been called emotional community; and it was forced, by the very conditions of composition, to be objective in every way. Until the period of written verse, when a poem could be composed in private and passed down to posterity by writing or by whatever mnemonic device, mainly as it was composed, poetry had to make this appeal to emotional community, to that entity which psychologists have studied so well in its modern and fugitive form as "the mind of an audience." Primitive poetry could not appeal to private sentiment and to the individual mind under conditions where the "mind of an audience" dominated the composition of verse as well as its reception and even transmission to other places and times. The modern poet addresses a disintegrated throng; he appeals to that compound of thought and emotion which sunders itself from the mass of men, and returns to the sense of communal sympathy only upon the broadly human lines of a common fate. He has withdrawn from the crowd into his "ivory tower;" but he looks out on a world instead of a village green. He works alternately with microscope and telescope; you may see

what he sees with either, but you must come singly into his tower. Do away with all this. Project that condition of "the mind of an audience" back into the past, increasing its power and scope as it recedes; as steadily reduce the power and scope of individual sentiment, of cosmic thinking; and when the process has reversed the present proportions of these two elements in poetry, there will be found approximately the conditions which ruled during the formative period of epic. True, our great epics do not come directly from the formative period; their "intellects are replenished," as anyone can see who compares them with a ballad, and it may even be that they have "drunk ink."¹ They have an artistic symmetry of design. Sundry passages show individual sentiment and even cosmic thinking; although this asserts itself mainly in comment upon the situation,² and is tentative, parenthetical, never an insistent mood. All this granted, however, it seems that criticism lays far too much stress upon such passages. The real greatness of the great epic lies in the communal elements which it holds in artistic frame, and in their quite dominant character. The main appeal is still, as in primitive times, to the emotional community, the "mind of an audience," an appeal which under modern conditions would be a renunciation of all poetic claims, but which, in the great epic, furnishes what one calls the majesty, the simplicity, the objectivity, now unattainable by poets at any price. Great passages can be found in modern poetry to match any great passages of the epic; and it is not to these that we are to look as the source of that objective and majestic power. Nor does it lie in the coherence of parts due to artistic design. Epic majesty is not an innovation, not a discovery of the epic poet, not an achievement of art; it is mainly a survival. If it is not a survival, the refuge of that older cumulative appeal to communal emotion, what do we mean when we say that the times of the great epic are vanished beyond recall? All this concerns the epic material; but evidence of a trustworthy kind shows that the difference of appeal in subject-matter of poetry runs parallel with a difference of appeal in poetic style.

¹ On the question of writing, see A. LANG, *Homer and the Epic*, pp. 46 ff.

² KELLER, *Homeric Society*, p. 115, says that human misery is Homer's abiding thought. Goethe, in a familiar phrase, expressed the same opinion.

Here, too, it would seem that the older art appealed by cumulative impression of details—the development of a more primitive identical repetition—to a sense of the whole; while the new art, according to critical canons the real art, appeals by imaginative provocation to a particular and detailed appreciation of parts. Roughly, this general distinction matches an older emotional, communal conception of human life, as compared with that civilized point of view which Vierkandt has called the “atomistic” or intellectual conception. The evidence of literature thus falls into line with sociological and ethnological facts. But the communal instinct will not utterly desert us, and lurks even in the critical brain. For all our atomistic conception, for all our individual canons of art, we are ready to call no literary effort genuinely great until, after the manner of the great epics, but with a difference, it unitessomecumulative impression with the provocative, sentimental, and imaginative appeal. Such a union is attained in Shakspeare’s drama as compared with one of George Chapman’s noble but overweighted and intellectualized plays. So it is, although on a lower level, with the narrative comedy which Fielding described in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* and fairly realized in *Tom Jones*—a great whole for which we find it impossible to account by summing up its great parts. Such is the ideal comedy, in its search for “the mind hovering above congregated men and women,” which Mr. George Meredith outlines in his fine essay¹ and works out in *The Egoist*. These, however, are the exceptions. Taking communal poetry in the mass, from rudest savage chants up to the so-called popular epic, and taking modern poetry in the mass, from Villon’s “Testament” to Browning’s epilogue in “Asolando,” that distinction of the formula stands out plain for eyes that are willing to see. Criticism cannot afford to ignore it and the lessons it can teach. So great a critic as Arnold, in a famous preface, went back to the cumulative appeal² in order to rebuke modern poetry and to lay a bit of blame upon Shakspeare for setting the fashion of writing fine passages; and then, years

¹ *On Comedy*, pp. 14 f.

² That is, he not only demanded proportion and symmetry, affair of the artist, but that sense of its greatness as a whole which besets the reader of a great epic, and which belongs to the communal side of the account.

afterward, in another famous preface,¹ quoting Shakspeare in all ardor, turns directly upon himself and declares that "lines and expressions of the great masters" are the tests of great poetry—atomistic instead of cumulative appeal. Utterances like these are puzzling until one reflects that in the first case a really eminent poet, who knew and loved his Homer, is prefacing his own attempt to achieve poetic objectivity, calm, impersonality of appeal, by a comparison of modern sentiment with the old epic excellence;² while in the second case he is casting about for a test which shall decide what modern poetry is really great. But the critic must not deal with historical material in this random way. He must face the formula of difference, the formula of cumulative or atomistic impression. To nearly all modern making, so individual in its appeal, one may lay the charge that the whole is less than the sum of its parts. So Arnold found when he weighed recent poetry in classical scales. But in poetry of the people, in ballads, in the spirit of epic, the sum of the parts is less than the whole. Now criticism, as Arnold showed when he stated his formula of "lines and expressions," deals mainly with the parts. Emotions converge, emotional expression runs to iteration, and the appeal to emotion makes an easy synthesis; thoughts, on the other hand, diverge, and when emotion is rationalized, one deals with sentiment and individual appreciations, where synthesis is hard. But that is precisely the usual task of criticism—synthesis of intellectual appreciations. In point of fact, let it be remembered, there were no critics so long as all poetry was mainly an appeal to emotional community; and it is said that this absence of criticism lasted through the period of rhapsodic verse.³ The canons of criticism have been formed almost exclusively from observation of individual poetry in its appeal to an intellectual and analytic appreciation. They are valid for that sort of verse. They are not valid for a time which produced poetry without producing critics and made the cumulative appeal to "emotional community." They are to be applied to the great epic only with full allowance for the rights of those communal elements which help to make it great. The critic

¹ Introduction to WARD's *English Poets*.

² One thinks of Goethe's passion for this old quality, and of his failures like the *Achilleis*.

³ EGGER, *Essai sur l'histoire de la critique, chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1887), p. 6.

may ask of modern artists in poetry if they possess *ces trois facultés essentielles . . . imagination, instinct créateur, et sentiment*;¹ he may praise an exquisite passage in Homer which shows these qualities, like the parting of Hector and Andromache, because it suits our atomistic and sentimental conception; but when he comes to the historical estimate, to the contemporary verdict on epic success, above all, when it is a question of the beginning and growth of poetry at large, then the critic should pause before he undertakes to judge past by present. Two chances of grave error, to which I have already referred, beset him. He is tempted to carry the atomistic conception, the intellectual and sentimental appeal, of modern poetry, back into the border-land of epic, not to speak of the ballad; and he is prone to regard what he calls the informing principle of poetic style, imaginative power, as a constant quality and test of poetry itself, as a thing not subject to ordinary laws of evolution.

Defending the claims of the *Nibelungen* to poetic greatness, one is tempted to offset Arnold's condemnation by the use of Arnold's own method, and so triumph by more judicious extracts. One insists, for example, on the beauty of a line in Rüdiger's speech,² during his colloquy with the Burgundians:

"Daz wolde got," sprach Rüdegêr, "vil edel Gêrnôt,
daz ir ze Rîne wæret unde ich wære tût . . ."

—surely a piece of noble sentiment, tragic, keen, with true climax of expression. A modern poet would stop then and there, to make his atomistic impression. In quoting, I fancy we all do stop there. The old poet, however, did not stop there, leaving details, reasons, concession, to care for themselves; he made the verses overflow into what we call unimaginative commonplace—and the earlier epic audience perhaps felt to be a good cumulative appeal:

"Daz wolde got," sprach Rüdegêr, "vil edel Gêrnôt,
daz ir ze Rîne wæret unde ich wære tût
mit etelichen êren, sît ich iuch sol bestân:
Ez enwart noch nie an degenen wîrs von friunden getân."

I am quite aware that the critic calls the other lines *flickverse*, awkward stopgap of the quatrain, and that we all call them a dis-

¹ GUYAU, *Problèmes*, p. 123.

² A, 2120.

appointment. A fine climax is thrown away. Taken alone, those impressive opening verses interpret a personal sentiment of the hero to the personal appreciation of the reader; they put one in the very citadel of Rüdiger's individuality; they are a noble human document. One reads on, and one is dragged into the mere tradition and detail of tragedy, into the market-place of emotion, and faces that old problem of kin and clan. One leaves the pretty personal *casus*—as of a Hamlet, an Orestes, a Rodrigue—and deals with the communal situation, the group, the place, the clash of kinship and vassalage. But what if this "would that I were dead," coupled with the generous wish for new-made kindred to escape, becomes, when read in our falsetto, mere travesty and fragment of a fine old choral which we have not the ears to hear? What if the restored climax is distortion after all, and not of a piece with the rest of the wild scene—the smoking ruins of the hall, the strife, the calls, the fierce taunts of Wolfhart and Volker, the back-and-forth of single combat, now here, now there? There are passages of sentiment in the *Nibelungen*, and noble enough. The death of Siegfried has such artistic touches, in addition to the cumulative and communal appeal. There are passages of romance outright, awkwardly as they fit the grim and unromantic whole. There are even imaginative touches of style. But one will do ill to defend the poetry of the *Nibelungen* by emphasis on these isolated passages, by appeal to the atomistic conception; for it is a poem which, in spite of relatively modern elements, still makes the old appeal by cumulative impression and by a kind of communal majesty. Its whole is greater than the sum of its parts; it must be read, as the Rüdiger episode ought to be read, as a whole; and each time that one thus reads it there comes, along with carelessness for "tonic" passages, a stronger sense of its mass, its cumulative strength.

I have hinted above that there is a short way with communal dissenters; one may simply throw out all the *flickverse*, all the accretions, and point with pride to a personally discovered epic of the most convincing sentiment and artistry. One may restore Rüdiger's climax, and charge to scribe, or editor, or whatever vagrom man the critic comprehends, those added and cumber-

some details. But this pretty way leads the editorial feet, the critical feet, into a hopeless mire. The process will not do. Those details may be cumbersome to Gigadibs the literary; but they are not accretions, they are survivals. If we assume that something like our traditional ballads preceded the epic, as its material, or if we admit that the ballad is simpler in form than the epic—and nobody denies that—we shall find that sentiment in the best ballads is in solution with the situation, and shows an inordinate love of details. Here, too, is the older stage of incremental repetition, a stage so remote from modern poetical style that it enables one to see plainly the primitive habit of outright iteration. But, apart from this, one notes in the ballad that same ignoring of climax in favor of cumulative detail which is noted in the epic, and without any excuse in the exigencies of an incomplete stanza:

The Persē leanyde on his brande
and sawe the Duglas de;
He took the dede mane by the hande,
and sayd ‘Wo ys me for the . . .

Well, *explicit quoth Richard Sheale*—and Percy? Not at all. There are interesting particulars:

‘To have savyde thy lyffe, I wolde have partyde with
my landes for years thre,
For a better man, of hart nare of hande,
was nat in all the north contrē.’

The appeal, one sees, is cumulative and not by suggestion and climax; the sympathy is matter of clan, family, station, country. If it was this fine old ballad that moved Sidney’s heart, and not “Otterburn,” then one may feel sure that the trumpet rang for him as clearly in the second of these stanzas as in the first, and that, with all his literary sympathies, he felt no temptation to stop with a *tremolo* on the “woe is me.” The trumpet blew from remote epic heights, and sounded its call to the old spirit of clan and kin.

So much seems clear and true. As for the movement from stage to stage of that process by which sentiment came to its mastery of modern verse, one must ask indulgence and leave to theorize. A bridge from clan-sentiment to personal sentiment,

from cumulative to atomistic and individual appeal, was furnished, I believe, at least for ballads, by the comparatively later element of pathetic and tragic love. In the great epics it is the comment of the singer which furnishes an individual and steadily growing sentiment; but with ballads and lyric what one may call the dual interest mediates between an older plurality, public interest of clan and kin, and that later confidence and privacy of the individual from which genuine ballads of tradition are entirely free. "The Twa Brothers," for example, has no trace of this confidence; but its climax, its incremental repetition, and its tragedy of kinship, all communal elements, are subservient to a hint of the dual interest. The brothers wrestle, and one stabs the other. "What," asks the sound one, "shall I say at home—to father?" "Say I am gone to England to buy him wine." "To mother?" "To buy her a gown." "To sister?" "To buy her a ring." "But what to your true-love?" The climax:

"Oh, tell her I lie in kirk-land fair,
And home again will never come."¹

From here to the desperate lover, the forsaken sweetheart, is no long step for even the popular muse; she begins to encourage an individual sentiment, a solitary confidence, lyric outright. Isolation once gained, the privileges of privacy must follow. There is no spoiling of the climax now, when a forsaken maid, with suggestive simile of love and morning-dew to back her emotion, makes the sentimental appeal, so like Rüdiger's cry, and yet so different from it:

"And O, if my young babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I myself were dead and gone
And the green grass growing over me!"

By such a bridge, and close behind such a half-popular, half-artistic song, solitary lovers, and solitary loves without a name, and then the lover's conventional deputy, Kingsley or whoever else, have found their way to the Braes of Yarrow, Arthur's Seat, Airlie Beacon, and all the other refuges of passion in despair.

¹ Compare a pretty hint of this dual interest at the end of a fairly communal ballad, *The Wife of Usher's Well*.

Over the same dividing stream, but by the *Ubi Sunt* bridge, Villon passed from a kind of guild-poem, impersonal didactics, a catalogue, to the personal but not amorous note of confidential lyric. Nobody is ever really the first to do anything; and the French critics will doubtless be scolded for making Villon first of his country to cross the stream, just as my own shy belief in William Dunbar as earliest confidential lyric poet of the English tongue will, if noted, be crushed by the ridicule of a wayfaring critic. But surely some explanation of the sort must be found to fit this progress of sentiment from dull choral iteration of a commonplace down to the piercing note of Burns and of Keats.

But it is hardly the critic's explanation. Looking at the poems which have been named, early lyric as well as late, ballad, and great epic passage too, the critic no doubt would say that the appeal, however simple, to sentiment of whatever sort, is by virtue of a quality which all good poetry must possess, and which, for lack of a more specific term, is called imagination. It is certain that Sainte-Beuve, whose criticism was anything but parochial and traditional, insisted that the grace of this same imagination, infused into the refrain of a famous ballade, made Villon take his place as first modern poet of France. Critically, this particular judgment may pass. Historically, it fails to explain the facts.¹ Again one asks for the formula of difference, and so comes to this hard problem: What is imagination for one who studies the phases of poetry in their evolution from low to high types? Let it be noted that I do not ask indiscreet questions about imagination as a quality in and for itself. Of all the kittle cattle to shoe, here is the worst. Imagination is so sacred in critical traditions that the student is warned against any mention of it except in metaphysical terms. He may say what it looks like when nobody can see it, but he must not play any scientific tricks and reduce it to older and lower elements in its historical manifestations. Yet this is what I shall try to do. I shall try to learn something about poetic imagination, not as the test of great poetic art, not as a mysterious quality of the human soul, but simply in its results, in

¹ It is hardly necessary to refer the reader to that little masterpiece of critical and historical study, the *Villon* of GASTON PARIS.

its workings as a factor in the making of poetry new and old, of poetry good, bad, and indifferent. I am told that this is dealing with "the mere mechanism of poetry," and that to show a scientific spirit spells ruin. The most tremendous feats of electricity in the modern world of science, the generation of intensest heat for the arts, may all be traced back to that familiar rubbing of two dry sticks. But the heat and light of poetry, so critics say, must be submitted to no such process of study, simply because poetry is not mechanical. "It comes from heaven, gentlemen; be silent, or else talk metaphysics." But poetry, while not mechanical, is a social product, and open to study on sociological lines as an element in human life. It has progressed, like other elements of life, from low types to high. It would not be hard to find an analogy for the initial rubbing of two dry sticks in the monotonous matching of rhythmic equivalents and the iteration of primitive chorus; nor would it be impossible to detect survivals of the process in modern verse. One must seek, in the evolution of poetry, for the constant element, the shifting conditions, and the formula of difference.

From this evolutionary point of view, modern poetic imagination may be regarded as the suggestion of what was once given in cumulative detail, and, earlier still, in long repetitions. The changes affect both subject-matter and style. If, in the traditional way, we regard rhythm, style, and subject-matter as the three divisions of poetry, we may count rhythm—the essential condition, though not the actual essence, of poetry—as its constant, communal element; subject-matter and style, on the other hand, vary with the conditions under which poetry is made. Imagination is in these the real differencing factor; while rhythm, had for the asking, is so obvious a matter that critics chafe at the idea of even its regulative importance.¹ It is with this attitude toward imagination as main element that the Abbé du Bos assures us, "the style of poetry constitutes the greatest difference between verse and prose," and has for its main object *de faire des images et de plaire à l'imagination*.² Cardinal Newman is convinced that

¹ This distinction between a factor which is essentially necessary and a factor whose necessity is "regulative," comes, if I do not err, from Kant.

² *Réflexions critiques*, 7th ed., Vol. I, pp. 298, 312.

poetry must adopt metaphorical phrase "as the only poor means allowed it for imparting its intense feelings."¹ Even Blackwell, pioneer of another school of criticism, lets imagination play the main part in his description of the rhapsodic process.² Fairly true for modern poetry, this notion of the imaginative function needs considerable mending if it is to include earlier stages of verse. As a matter of style in the narrower sense, a process of evolution must be assumed for it, which began with repetition as the earliest form of emphasis. Variation, by playing on repetition, develops the conscious metaphor; and in metaphor one is already passing along the lines of cumulative appeal to suggestion, to the provocation of thought and of intellectual appreciation of parts. Repetition, of course, is constant in the communal element of rhythm, and even appears in style as an effective device for mainly emotional purposes. But variation and suggestion rouse individual thought, and turn appreciation from the whole to the parts. On the surface, then, imaginative power in the subject-matter and style of poetry runs a course of development from primitive iteration, through variation, down to abridgment and suggestion. It is no exclusively poetic process. With riper culture one will always refer, hint, summarize, rather than state at length. Conversation of bright people differs from the *com-mérage* of washerwomen, the anecdotal vein of Mrs. Quickly, mainly in this preference for hints and allusion over details; for ultimate material all lean with equal love on scandal and the common doings of men. In the later poetry, imaginative provocation takes the place of ballad iteration and epic "breadth." To explain this by saying that iteration and breadth are qualities of the ballad and epic, forms of poetry to which genius does not turn any more, is to put the cart before the horse and to interpret a cause by its result. Not new details, whether of matter or of style, can quicken poetry to its best, but a new power of suggestion playing over the old and familiar material. Coleridge, whom I shall quote presently for this argument, went to Sir H. Davy's lectures at the Royal Institution avowedly "to increase his stock of metaphors;"³ but his triumphs, metaphorical and material both,

¹ *On Poetry*, ed. COOK, p. 11. ² *Enquiry*, p. 120. ³ *Poetical Works*, ed. CAMPBELL, p. lix.

came not that way, and do not remind us of Euphues and Jean Paul. As little did poetry win by the efforts of men like Dr. Aikin, in theory, and Erasmus Darwin, in practice, to annex scientific territory to the old realm of verse. It has really made its best gains by retreating to an inner citadel.

For poetry and practical science run in opposite courses; the former has been called from details and events into a nearer, narrower range, while the useful arts have reached farther and farther from the human mind which conceived them. Garment, house, tool, weapon, conveyance, communication, are all projections of the bodily function, and steadily widen their reach; but poetry has been as steadily compressing the exterior world, both space and time, into the nutshell of man's imagination. It is thus to modern phases of poetry that Sainte-Beuve's pretty word chiefly applies: *la poésie ne consiste pas à tout dire, mais à tout faire rêver*. For older verse it is not a good formula. In the matter of style, as in the matter of sentiment, one must not too boldly apply it to a poetry which delighted in iteration and breadth, and which made the cumulative, not the suggestive and analytical appeal. Years ago, I did apply it to the concluding lines of the prelude in *Beowulf*.¹ The application will still pass, but not in the sense originally intended; for those concluding lines are not of the epic essence. The main prelude, beautiful as it is, seems to me a transcript of old epic material, cumulative in appeal, communal in spirit, with this touch of the suggestive, individual, provocative, imaginative, added as the poet's own contribution. Like certain passages in Homer, it is his comment on his material. Nobody, I suspect, really looks for a primitive whole in this epic, but only for a survival of primitive elements in artistic frame. The art is rough, but it is art. An older version of the prelude doubtless administered no fillip to the imagination and opened no world of dreams; it gave to the primitive audience what men in the street still desire in such a case—full details of the funeral. The touch of communal emotion is sincere and old; "mournful was the mood" of those once kingless men who saw the ship and its burden drift away. But the final verses, artistic by design or by accident, touch another chord:

¹ *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. VII, "On the Translation of *Beowulf*."

Men ne cunnon
 secgan tō sōðe selerædende,
 hæleð under heofenum, hwā þæm hlæste onfēng.

It is the ballads, with their incessant incremental repetition, that best keep up that old cumulative appeal, although with it goes a swiftness of omission quite opposed to epic breadth. Sometimes, too, suggestion is substituted by modern verse without abridgment of details. If one will read a ballad of the type of "Clerk Colvill,"¹ even in its fragmentary form, and then compare it with a poem on the same theme, like the "Belle Dame sans Merci" of Keats, one can measure the difference between cumulative appeal by details, and the suggestive use of details externally similar to those of the communal account. Mainly, however, the change concerns expression rather than plot and story. Not long ago, in a curious tale, Mr. Kipling named two fairly obvious passages of English poetry as supreme in imaginative reach—those "magic casements" of Keats, and Coleridge's "savage spot" with its "woman wailing for her demon lover." It is clear that all the world prefers these wonderful abridgments and suggestions to the exquisite descriptions in detail that sundry poets, notably Arnold, have tried to revive in modern times. Imaginative provocation lies in both methods, but the abridgment wins more favor. And now for our question. Why are those lines of Keats, of Coleridge, so imaginatively strong? Why are they so suggestive? Psychology, criticism, may each have an answer; for the historical student the magic of such a passage lies in its power to sum up the whole material that poetry has been making from the start. The casements open on a world of past poetic achievement. Because ballad and song once laid hold upon man by cumulative impression, and drove home their themes into the heart of communal emotion; because epic had set whole cycles of adventure, deeds of war, and the round of human life before man's collective and contemporary sympathy; because what we call romance said a last word for this old world as it faded away, so precisely what we call romantic in the imperious suggestion of the poet, his single word *perilous*, his hint of infinite details carried in a

¹ CHILD, Vol. III, pp. 387 f., Version A.

syllable or so, now sets the individual and his atomistic conception upon memories and dreams. Until the individual conquers this world he cannot dream. Children, rude folk generally, would rather hear, as the communal audience preferred to hear, a ballad like "Tam Lin," like "Thomas Rymer," than be moved to construct tale and scene from Coleridge's moonlight and maid and demon-lover. Once the thing itself was worth far more than a romantic shiver at the mention of it. Now one forgets the reality in the vision. "Upon his shield a burning brand," says Coleridge with marvelous recapitulation of all the best of chivalry; there are still folk who will prefer to read the old romance itself; and once it had no substitute.¹ Try Coleridge further; in the study of this poetic phase there can be no better aid to reflection than that which he gives. Try him again in his suggestion:

To hear thee sing some ballad full of woe,
Ballad of shipwreck'd sailor floating dead,
Whom his own true-love buried in the sands.

Yet Coleridge will not and cannot give the ballad. He tried it once, old style and all, in "The Three Graves"—and failed. He would himself send you, as he went himself, to "Sir Patrick Spens," or, had he known it, to that Westphalian version of the old Hero and Leander motive, "*Et wasen twei kunnigeskinner*." He did find his way to something better, at least for modern taste, than the old songs; and by the provocation, suggestion, imaginative reach of *The Ancient Mariner*,² he showed how one may compass results of the old ballad without making its cumulative appeal. In *Christabel* he took the same attitude toward old epic and romance. Even old lyric he met by a new suggestion:

And the spring comes slowly up this way

Exquisite enough!

Lenten is comen with love to towne,
says the old English song almost as prettily; but it lays no stress

¹ I think we ought to strive, in season and out of season, to banish suggestive and sentimental poetry from the reading of children. Ballad and simple epic, with lyric transcripts of the outer world, are the only practical material for children's reading or hearing. To force the appreciation of suggestive verse is fatal.

² Even in cases as vss. 41 ff., this poem is not cumulative, but thoroughly suggestive.

on the line, puts no provocation into it, and proceeds to give a bill of particulars about birds and flowers.

At one stride comes the dark . . .

Coleridge again, and a telling phrase. But there is no such poetical suggestion, not even the mythological significance which Grimm welcomed, hardly a conscious metaphor, in the line of our old *Genesis*,¹ when Eve

Pæt léoht geseah
ellor scrīðan . . .

It is in a nobler epic than this Scripture paraphrase that one seeks an ancient English parallel for the suggestive power of Coleridge's imagination. We saw how, consciously or unconsciously, the poet of the *Beowulf* sets us dreaming by a phrase. It is the same poet that furnishes a good parallel passage, still laden with something of the old cumulative appeal, but fairly suggestive, to one of Coleridge's best achievements. Let the reader shut his eyes and repeat the opening of *Kubla Khan*, with Alph, the sacred river, running its cavernous way down to the sunless sea, to the lifeless ocean; then let this well-known passage of the *Beowulf*² be compared:

Hie dýgel lond
warigeað, wulfhleoðu, windige næssas,
frécne fengelád, pær fyrgenstréam
under næssa genipu niðer gewiteð,
flód under foldan . . .

If any doubt lingers in the reader's mind that imaginative suggestion here dominates an older cumulative appeal, let him read on to where the hounded stag pauses at the bank above rather than plunge into that mysterious water. If anything is certain about the *Beowulf*, it is the intention of its poet to do in such a description what Coleridge³ said his own youthful verses, otherwise of no value, tried to achieve with their "strivings of mind and struggles after the Intense and Vivid." To attain this intense

¹ GREIN-WÜLKER, *Bibliothek*, Vol. II, p. 357, vss. 772 f.

² Vss. 1357 ff. There are obvious relations here with the growing disposition of poetry to treat nature in terms of individual experience, a subject on which there is still room for investigation.

³ Work quoted, p. 1.

and vivid quality, to heighten suggestion and curtail cumulative garrulity, poets have made numberless corrections in their written work. These, indeed, we can seldom compare with earlier and tentative copies; but happy cases occur. So Milton,¹ in his minor poems, shows the effort not only after correctness, ease, fit metaphor, but also after more vivid suggestion. With the more negligible class belong changes like "mixe yo^r choise chords" to "wed your divine sound," or "triple row" to "burning row," and "drowned nature's chime" to "jarred against nature's chime"—an escape from catachresis. But the higher mood appears when, in *Comus*, "Ayrie touns that lure night wanderers" becomes as now, "Ayrie touns *that syllable men's names*"—subtler imaginative suggestion for mere suggestive detail.

I have thus tried to gain a formula of difference for poetic evolution, from the simple communal type to the more artistic and complicated structure of today, mainly in terms of the growth of sentiment and of suggestive imagination, two passions that maintain a joint sovereignty in modern verse. If the result is in any wise satisfactory, if the formula is adequate, it ought to help that discussion about the real character of the traditional or popular ballad, a subject, as Professor Bücher has hinted, which is not to be approached from the modern canons of art. Mr. Henderson's introduction to the new edition of Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* takes a quite hostile tone toward the theory that ballads are in any part or element survivals of an older kind of poetry. In a third paper, and a brief one—no longer, it may be hoped, than the first—I shall try to submit this question, not to modern criticism, not to æsthetic theories, but to the formula established by a study of ethnological and literary facts.

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¹ *Facsimile of the Manuscript, etc.*, Cambridge, 1899.